



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**

### **Lesson 16.2 – The Doctrine of the Election of Grace (Predestination)**

#### **How Believers Are Preserved in the Faith**

When believers lose their faith and fall from grace, it is their own fault. But when they continue in the faith and remain in grace, this is not to their credit. They owe this entirely to the grace of God. The fact is that we do not and cannot keep ourselves in the faith. It is God who keeps us in the faith. This is an activity of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace. The apostle Peter praises the Lord for bringing people to faith and for keeping them in that faith. He says that believers in Christ **“are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”** (1 Peter 1:5). He wrote: **“May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”** (1 Peter 5:10-11).

The apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it”** (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). **“The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one”** (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Paul wrote to the Philippians in a similar way, saying that he was **“confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”** (Philippians 1:6). **“It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”** (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus Himself said concerning His sheep: **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand”** (John 10:28-29).

Just as God calls us by the Gospel and brings us to faith in Him through the means of grace, so also He keeps us in the faith through the same means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Jesus said that the rich man in hell was concerned about his five brothers who were still living on earth. He wanted the beggar Lazarus to rise from the dead and warn them, so that they might not suffer as he was suffering. But he was told: **“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. ... If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead”** (Luke 16:29, 31). There is nothing more powerful than the Word of God. It is the only things that can bring people to faith in Christ and keep them in that faith.

On the night before He died Jesus told His disciples: **“The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit has taught us these things in the words of our New Testament. Jesus said: **“He will guide you into all truth”** (John 16:13). When Peter and John wanted to encourage the Christians in their care and keep them faithful to the Lord, how did they do it? They wrote to them and talked to them; they used the Gospel words of their Master. Peter wrote: **“I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand”** (1 Peter 5:12). John wrote: **“Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full”** (2 John 12). The tools the Holy Spirit uses to keep us in the faith so that we persevere to the end are the Gospel words of encouragement and comfort that are written in the Bible (and in books based on the Bible) and

spoken face-to-face by one Christian to another. Through written and spoken means the Holy Spirit keeps us **“mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior”** (2 Peter 3:2). Since baptism and the Lord’s Supper are Gospel sacraments that convey the forgiveness of sins won by Christ, the Holy Spirit also uses these sacraments to sustain our faith in Christ.

In and of ourselves we are helpless, for, as the prophet Jeremiah says, **“the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”** (Jeremiah 17:9). But our faithful God in His governance of the universe controls all temptations that confront us and He protects us against our own sinful flesh. The psalmist David teaches us to look to our God for help, when he prays: **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me”** (Psalm 51:10-11). It is God who must work in us to keep us faithful. Therefore we pray to Him: **“Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness”** (Psalm 119:33-36).

The apostle Paul tells us: **“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear”** (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Because our God keeps us in the faith through the Gospel, we need to focus at all times on the salvation God has worked for us through Christ and His precious Gospel promises, especially as we face all the difficulties of the Christian life. We can say with Paul: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, no powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:35-39).

## Questions

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1. Who is it that preserves believers in their faith in Christ?
2. Why is it that they cannot keep themselves in this faith?
3. What does God use to preserve us in the true faith?
4. Prove from Scripture your answer to the previous question.
5. How did the apostles Peter and John encourage the Christians in their care?
6. Whose fault is it when believers lose their faith?
7. Explain why believers should not take the credit themselves for continuing in the faith.